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SUBJECT: INDUSTRIAL DNIPROPETROVSK: TYMOSHENKO'S HOME  
OBLAST STAYING BLUE

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

#### Summary

1. (C) Dnipropetrovsk, PM Tymoshenko's home region and a major contributor to the national economy, has traditionally favored Yanukoyvch and his Party of Regions (PoR). Tymoshenko's bloc (BYuT) is actively working for votes in the region, but interlocutors assess she will fail to overcome PoR's dominance there. Our contacts say minor candidate Serhiy Tihipko will garner some support in the oblast, but expect a Tymoshenko-Yanukovych matchup in the second round. Some express concern about the possibility of fraud on the margins, especially in the second round. End Summary.

#### Notable Eastern Oblast

2. (C) Despite being Tymoshenko's home oblast, Dnipropetrovsk has been decidedly "blue" in the past several elections. Yanukovych took 61 percent of the final 2004 presidential vote, and PoR polled a near-majority in both the 2006 and 2007 Rada elections. A number of Ukraine's political and economic elite, including former President Kuchma and leading oligarchs like Ihor Kolomyyskyy and Viktor Pinchuk, have roots there. One of just a handful of "donor" oblasts to the national budget, Dnipropetrovsk is a major contributor to Ukraine's economy in metallurgy, the defense industry and banking, in addition to being a hub for rail and sea shipping and an agricultural center.

#### Signs Point to Yanukoyvch

3. (C) Local experts in Dnipropetrovsk presume a Tymoshenko-Yanukovych matchup in the second round and expect Yanukovych to secure a comfortable victory in the oblast in both rounds of the election. Oleksandr Smirnov, Chief of the Dnipropetrovsk branch of the Gorshenin Institute, a national think tank, said that the economic crisis and PoR's spot in the national-level Rada opposition has increased its consistently strong local support by around five percent. Party-unaffiliated deputy mayor of Dnipropetrovsk Volodymyr Tyurin and chief of the local branch of the NGO Committee of Voters of Ukraine Oleksandr Sydorenko also agreed that, for better or worse, Yanukovych would win the oblast easily.

#### Deputy Mayor Sees a Frustrating Choice

4. (C) Tyurin told us that, in the end, people will vote for the candidate they personally like, regardless of campaign slogans and platforms. He predicted that Yanukovych would win the second round by about five to fifteen percent in the oblast because the population -- mostly employed by local industries -- can relate to him as a factory chief. He predicted that Tymoshenko would capture votes from the more

highly-educated segment of the population, including those in the defense industrial complex.

¶15. (C) Tyurin emphasized Dnipropetrovsk's potential for economic development, and said that he will reluctantly support Tymoshenko on the off-chance that she would abandon her populism, rash ambition, and personal business interests for the good of the country's development and European integration. Yanukovych would not change the situation for the better, said Tyurin, adding that Russia has the capability to absorb the Ukrainian economy if it comes to that.

BYuT Headquarters Energetic, Organized  
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¶16. (C) At BYuT's Dnipropetrovsk headquarters, we met with Tymoshenko's aunt, Antonina Ulyakhina -- longtime head of BYuT operations in the oblast -- and her deputy, Valeriy Murlyan, who were engaged in a well-oiled effort to maximize Tymoshenko's support. Ulyakhina said that Tymoshenko would project a positive message in the face of what she expected to be a vicious campaign, already apparent, she alleged, in current "black PR" attacks such as the accusation that BYuT MPs were involved in a pedophilia scandal at the famous Artek youth camp in the Crimea. (Comment. BYuT appears to have rethought this commitment to the "high road," as the party's website has recently resurfaced allegations that Yanukovych was guilty of rape during his days in a youth gang in the 60s. See septel on the mud-slinging kickoff to the election campaign. End Comment.)

KYIV 00001845 002 OF 003

PoR Chugging Along  
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¶17. (C) PoR's local campaign operation was less well-appointed than BYuT's, but the workers were busy nonetheless. MP Oleh Tsaryev, chief of PoR's regional headquarters, did not seem very plugged in to local affairs, offering only superficial comments echoing PoR's general platform, with a focus on Russian-language rights for eastern and southern Ukrainians. Tsaryev maintained, unconvincingly, that local citizens are actually using Yanukovych's advertised hotline and are expressing concerns about municipal issues such as heating and land distribution. (Note: Murlyan said BYuT had verified that the hotline is not actually in service at the local level.)

¶18. (C) Tsaryev said that Yanukovych wants to unite the country and would rely on one message to do it: stability and professionalism in government. He argued that the current leadership's unresponsiveness on issues such as language rights left PoR constituents looking to Russia for support. He added, however, that while PoR's electoral base has a natural affinity with Russia, PoR businessmen are not interested in thoroughgoing economic integration with Ukraine, a large eastern neighbor. (Comment. Tsaryev implied that PoR businessmen would resist such integration with Russia because they are looking westward for investment opportunities and competing with Russian businessmen in Ukraine could edge them out of their own market. End Comment.)

Tymoshenko Most Likely to Commit Fraud?  
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¶19. (C) Our interlocutors said that if fraud is to occur in Dnipropetrovsk, it would happen in the second round at Tymoshenko's behest. Sydorenko did not expect much fraud in the first round, but said that if the race looks very close, Tymoshenko may have to resort to fraudulent tactics even at that early stage. Our contacts said the real pressure would come in the second round, and Tymoshenko would be looking to her local staff to "produce certain results." Sydorenko is

most worried about falsifications during transportation of ballots and protocols from polling stations to district election commissions, alleging that BYuT has improved its capability to manipulate ballots at this stage after clumsy attempts in the past. Sydorenko also expects a full range of other fraud tactics, such as ballot-stuffing and bribery of voters and commissioners. However, Tyurin estimated that fraud would not exceed three percent of the vote, and predicted it might be closer to one or two percent.

#### Tihipko Will Be a Factor

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¶10. (SBU) Sydorenko opined that presidential candidate Serhiy Tihipko -- who hails from Dnipropetrovsk and is widely considered to be a "technical" candidate (a stalking horse for someone else, designed to draw votes away from a leading candidate) for Tymoshenko -- may garner a significant amount of votes in the first round. Ulyakhina made no mention of "technical" candidacies, but asserted that Tihipko's business and political background in the oblast would ensure him some support, and estimated he would be the fourth most popular candidate there (assuming Arseniy Yatsenyuk would take third).

#### Differing Views of New Rada Election Possibility

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¶11. (C) Most contacts said the decision to call new Rada elections would depend on the results of the second round of the presidential vote. If the victor wins by a small margin, some foresaw an internal shift within the existing deputies for another iteration of a "situational majority" in which business-connected MPs from the losing faction opt to defect to the winning team. Sydorenko did not expect a new Rada election, noting that the parties have no ideology apart from their business interests and will simply make adjustments according to the election result. Tyurin also commented that Ukrainian political parties are nothing more than closed joint stock companies and make decisions accordingly. Smirnov, on the other hand, saw a high chance of a new Rada election, based on concessions in exchange for smaller parties' support for a certain candidate in the second round. Tsaryev, perhaps presuming a wide margin of victory for Yanukovych, said PoR would support new Rada elections regardless.

#### Comment

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KYIV 00001845 003 OF 003

¶12. (C) Dnipropetrovsk will, in all likelihood, give Yanukovych a comfortable plurality, even if Tymoshenko's (and Tihipko,s) home-town status nibbles at the margins of the PoR vote. On the potential for fraud, given the dominance of Party of Regions locally, they seem better positioned to engage in it (if it happens) than BYuT, although our interlocutors seemed, surprisingly, to think otherwise.

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